

Go and Do Likewise

Luke 10:25-37, Proper 10, Year C

July 14, 2019, St. Augustine's, Langley, WA

The Rev. Diana Peters

Today we have one of the most famous of Jesus' parables to consider: The Story of the Good Samaritan. There aren't too many people, at least here in America, who haven't heard of this story, or maybe even acted as the Samaritan themselves. I know you've heard it. Perhaps you've even been a Good Samaritan to a stranger who was in need.

I read this more modern story of a good Samaritan story on the internet recently:

A farm boy was driving his wagon full of hay down the road. At one point, though, he got too close to a ditch and turned the wagon over, spilling a huge mound of hay down into the ditch. Luckily a neighbor happened by and saw the young man standing, looking at the hay and scratching his head. The neighbor took pity on the boy and he stopped. "Son," he said, "I'll help you pick up this mess, but first, come on with me and we'll have some supper."

"Well," the boy said, "that's real neighborly of you, but I don't think my brother Pete would want me to."

"Nonsense!" the neighbor said, "A young man like you needs fuel to run on. Come have supper; then I'll help you pick up the hay."

"Okay," he said, "but Pete's not gonna' like it."

So the man took the boy home with him and they had a big farm-type supper. After supper the boy said, "Thanks! I feel much better, but we better get goin.' Pete's gonna' be really mad."

"You keep saying that," says the neighbor. "Why? Is it Pete's hay? Where is Pete anyway?" To which the boy answered, "Under the hay."

Okay, so it isn't exactly like Jesus' parable. But there is a victim, and a Good Samaritan.

In Luke's story, a lawyer asks Jesus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus who respects the scriptures of his people refers the inquirer to what he, being a lawyer must know -- the Mosaic Law. The lawyer answers correctly with what the Jews called the *Shema*, which comes from Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." And then he quotes from the Law of Leviticus, "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus tells the lawyer that his answer is correct, so "Do this and you will live." But evidently the man finds a stumbling block in the last part, about loving "your neighbor as yourself." The actual scripture says, "But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Hmm. "Wanting to justify himself." That's a strange statement, one that is puzzling. I've always wondered why the lawyer needed to "justify himself" by asking that question. Some people claim that the lawyer just wanted to look smarter than Jesus, or to trip him up, somehow. But to me it implies that maybe he isn't totally following the letter of that law, the one that demands love of neighbor. And maybe he needs to justify his right-ness, or his righteousness, by seeking to qualify and quantify the definition of "neighbor." Like he's saying, "You really don't mean to

include everyone in that definition.” My “neighbor” certainly can’t include some people. Like those who:

- Are Foreigners – Samaritans, Hondurans, Iranians, Mexicans, Sudanese, or, God forbid, Texans, or Tunisians. Especially if those foreigners are trying to get into my country illegally!
- Are a different religion from me (Muslims, Jews, Hindu, or ... Jehovah Witnesses?)
- Look different - A different skin color, body type, someone who wears different clothing, weird head coverings, has piercings or tattoos, or people who are badly dressed, dirty, or smelly
- Act strangely – mentally ill folks, non-English speakers, teenagers, people who play rap music loudly in their cars, millennials, alcoholics and druggies, people in prisons, liars, thieves, murderers. They don’t live in my neighborhood!

Who was it, I wonder, that the lawyer didn’t feel deserved his love, and subsequently wanted to justify himself by excluding them from the class of “neighbors?” Who could he justifiably ignore, when the Law dictated that he love his neighbors as he loved himself? Where was the loophole here?

Well, I must confess, I guess that sometimes I’d like to limit that definition too. That loophole sounds pretty good, a convenient way to justify my own behavior, when I haven’t exactly “loved my neighbor” the way I think God wants me to. Maybe you have felt the same way at times? It’s hard to love those who seem to be trying so hard to be un-lovable. It would be so nice to have a slightly ambiguous loophole to let us off the hook from loving just anyone, wouldn’t it?

But, as the lawyer found out, Jesus wasn’t into loopholes. Instead, Jesus told a story: A wounded man is bypassed by two of the most respectable, religious representatives of the community, a priest and a Levite. They pretend they don’t see the dying man. It is easier to pretend not to see someone, isn’t it? They are both so busy; their hands were clean, their clothes were nice, they didn’t really have the time to get soiled with mud or (ick!) blood. And the man could be dead! They would become ritually “unclean” and it could take up to a week to recover from that. It was easier, more expedient, if they just didn’t see him. These were respectable people. (Let us take this time to remember all the victims to whom we, like the priest and the Levite, have been blind and have bypassed: Remembering their faces, naming them in our minds, grieving them in our hearts)*

But the Samaritan, the known outcast, apparently is not bothered by outward niceties and has 20/20 vision. He stops and helps -- the kind of help that takes commitment, not here today and gone tomorrow help. He treats the wounds with his own hands, takes the victim to an inn, he stays with him through the night, he pays the bill, and he comes back to check on him.

No questions are asked, except the one asked by Jesus, "Which one of the three, do you think, was a neighbor?"

The Lawyer answers, "The one who showed him mercy."

"Go and do likewise," is the simple command of Jesus. Do likewise, show mercy.

After all, it was the Law. The Law of God. The Law that, to the Jews, was good, it was sweet, it was a delight. It was the Law that demanded all the heart, all the soul, all the mind and might. The Law, with a capital "L" that for centuries had kept the people of Israel and Judah focused on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And **obedience** to that Law, declared by the prophets, was the best sacrifice one could offer to God.

Showing mercy was the Jewish way of bearing fruit. In the Epistle today, the Colossians, are exhorted to fruit " *so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.*"

It's a good thing to remember, to take with us as we leave church today -- the vision of the Good Samaritan, the words of our Lord, "Go and do likewise," the exhortation to the Colossians: Bear fruit in every good work." And "grow in the knowledge of God."

It sounds difficult, maybe even impossible, I know. But with the power and grace of God through Jesus Christ, we can live in obedience to the law: loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our strength, and with all our minds; and our neighbor as ourselves" After all, don't they say, "They will know we are Christians by our love." And for that I say, "Thanks be to God." Amen.